Experiences and Practices of Northeastern University's English-teaching International MBA Program

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Abstract. The School of Business Administration of Northeastern University (P.R. China) firstly launched its International MBA program in 2015 fall semester. Participants of the program are all international students. The teaching task is challenging to faculties as the students are diversified in their homelands, cultures, religions and languages, and most of the international students cannot communicate in Chinese. To ensure the quality of this program, the school decided to conduct all courses in English. In this paper, we outlined problems emerged during the teaching process and found that communication remained to be a major issue to be addressed. We discussed possible solutions to smooth the teaching process between faculty members and the students.

Introduction

As to student internationalized education, to follow the globalization trend of higher education and meet the demand of cultivating global management talents, NEU business school actively enhanced its exchange activities and cooperation with foreign Universities in recent years. The school established excellent cooperation relationship with business school or management school of Universities from US, Canada, Japan, Korea, Belgium and China's Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan SAR.

NEU’s IMBA (International MBA) program is launched under the background of NEU’s commitment of building "a domestically first-class, internationally recognized University that takes the leading role in the process of China's new-type industrialization"[1]. This program is aimed to cultivate highly responsible, familiar with transnational cultures, skilled in innovative thinking international management elites with global vision. To ensure the quality of this program, the school decided to conduct all courses in English.

Teaching-in-English is an immersion teaching [2–4]. Due to exam-oriented English education system in China, Chinese faculties are not confident to conduct their courses in English but more comfortable with bilingual teaching. In China, bilingual teaching means that lecturers use PPT in English, but still explain in Chinese. Unfortunately, this won’t work in IMBA program, and Teaching-in-English is way different from bilingual teaching [5-7].

In this paper, we outlined problems emerged during the teaching process and then discussed possible solutions to smooth the teaching process between faculty members and the students.

The School’s History and Profile

Founded in 1923, Northeastern University (NEU) has a glorious tradition of patriotism. As a famous patriot, General Zhang Xue-liang (Peter Chang) served as president of the University from August 1928 to January 1937. In March 1949, Shenyang Industrial College was established based on the School of Engineering and School of Science in Northeastern University, and then was renamed as Northeastern University of Technology in August 1950. On March 8, 1993, Northeastern University of Technology recovered its original name Northeastern University. Northeastern University is
operated directly under the Ministry of Education. As one of the top ranking universities in China, Northeastern University was designated and financially supported by national programs including "211 Project" and "985 Project". Now its mission is “to be built into a world class university with Chinese characteristics, and to lead in the new industrialization process in China”.

NEU's business school was founded in 1994 evolving from NEU law school's department of business and industrial administration (1939), Northeastern University of Technology's office of metallurgy enterprise economic organization and plan (1954), management engineering office (1978), and management engineering department (1980). Through generations' unremitting efforts, especially the high-speed growth during the last 39 years of China's reform and opening-up period, NEU business school has developed into an important and influential academic organization.

The school now has 11 departments, 151 staff members, in which 113 are full time faculty members. Faculty members includes 30 professors, 55 associate professors, 1 Yangtze river professor (Prof. Fang Zhiping), 1 Yangtze river visiting scholar (Prof. Lin Yunfeng), 3 special government allowance winners, 1 National science outstanding youth fund project winner, 6 education department's new century excellent talents support plan winners, 3 provincial teaching master award winners, 4 NEU teaching master award winners, 1 provincial teaching team award winner, 1 provincial college students practice education base.

The school has 3276 students in total, including 1548 undergraduate students, 449 full-time graduate students (300 research-type master candidates and 149 application-type master candidates), 303 engineering master candidates, 575 MBA students, 35 EMBA students, and 366 Ph.D candidates. In its 23 years history since the foundation of the school, NEU business school has educated more than 6000 bachelor degree graduates, and more than 5000 master/Ph.D degree graduates. A significant number of these graduates have become management elites in various social sectors, and are now taking on vital responsibilities in China's economic and social development.

The NEU’s International MBA Program

NEU’s IMBA program is launched under the background of NEU’s commitment of building "a domestically first-class, internationally recognized University that takes the leading role in the process of China's new-type industrialization". This program is aimed to cultivate highly responsible, familiar with transnational cultures, skilled in innovative thinking international management elites with global vision. In September 2015, NEU IMBA program welcomed its first group of IMBA students. In this 19 students class, 9 come from Vietnam, 3 from China, 2 from Nigeria, 1 from Kenya, 1 from Yemen, 1 from Rwanda, 1 from Gabon and 1 from Germany. In September 2016, more students chose to participate in NEU’s IMBA program. Of the 26 students in 2016 class, 13 from Russia, 3 from Korea, 3 from Vietnam, 2 from Pakistan, 2 from Bangladesh, 1 from Thailand, 1 from Laos, 1 from Nepal, 1 from Dominica, and 1 from Surinam.

As the students are diversified in their homelands, cultures, religions and languages, and most of them cannot communicate in Chinese. The school decided to conduct all courses in English. In order to improve the education quality of IMBA program, the school invited professor Sun Minghe from University of Texas at San Antonio to teach 'Mathematics Statistics', professor Liu Yunchuan from University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to teach 'Pricing Strategy and Tactics', Tech strategy VP Mr. Maximilian Hauk from BMW-Brilliance as guest speaker to lecture on 'digitalization and industry 4.0: Auto manufacturer's future and vision', president of H&R Mr. Jürgen Czajor from DRAXLMAIER (Shenyang) corporation to lecture on 'Talent Management in Practice' and etc.

Weaknesses of IMBA Program

The school recently conducted a survey to gather feedbacks from IMBA students, and found a few problems to be addressed.
1) The faculty is relatively weak. The weakness of the faculty can be illustrated in the following three aspects. First, some of the courses only have one lecturer, so the formation of a teaching team is out of the question. Second, there is a lack of IMBA lecturers with both academic experiences and professional experiences. Third, the number of teachers with overseas study and/or working experiences is relatively small. Over 50% IMBA students have reported that they had difficulties in communication with faculties, and they believe that communication is a major issue in their study.

2) Curriculum setup still needs to be improved. In spite of the updating and improvement of the curriculum setup. However, through early stage survey and international exchange experience, the school should establish an adjustment mechanism for its curriculum system, and therefore adjust its curriculum system constantly in accordance with change of knowledge and demand of new era. (there is still great room for further improvement in meeting the training requirements of IMBA students.)

3) Teaching facilities needs further improvement. In 2014, the business school is wholly relocated to Hunnan campus, but the IMBA program is still remained in Nanhua campus due to the uniqueness of IMBA students, and all IMBA teaching facilities is administrated by the University. This affects the course schedule and other arrangements to some extent.

Measures to Improve IMBA Program’s Quality

In order to improve the quality of the IMBA program, the school has took measures to reform its teaching strategy and streamline the teaching process.

1) Globalization of school's teaching and research. As to student internationalized education, to follow the globalization trend of higher education and meet the demand of cultivating global management talents, NEU business school actively enhanced its exchange activities and cooperation with foreign Universities in recent years. The school established excellent cooperation relationship with business school or management school of Universities from US, Canada, Japan, Korea, Belgium and China's Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan SAR. On the basis of student exchange program agreement, the school attracted a significant number of international students and sending Chinese students to study oversea at the same time. Student exchange program offers an extraordinary opportunity for students to widen the global vision, while the arrival of international students also brings a channel and window for domestic students. Besides, the school frequently invited globally prestigious scholars and outstanding managers from foreign companies. Students learned advance management ideas, cutting edge knowledge, and latest trend of management theories. These events have positive effects in shaping global vision.

As to faculty internationalized training, via the periodic financial assistance form national study abroad fund committee, the school can provides financial support to faculty members to study aboard and transfer their teaching load to other faculty members. The school encourages faculty members to study aboard to promote their international communication skills and research ability.

2) The school encourages and supports faculty members to study or visit other education institutions both home and abroad. The school set up department academic activity fund, encourages and supports faculty members to study or visit other education institutions to promote their teaching and research skills. The range of exchange activities supported includes: a. to learn the latest development, development trend, and major issues in a specific subject under the background of a broader subject; b. to study and master major frontier research results in a specific subject, update scientific development idea and knowledge; c. in the domain of a subject, conduct specific subject research and project search on frontier and hot issues, d. to study the classic theory in a specific subject in depth, and enhance the understanding of theory and literacy; e. to study the relevant development, frontier questions and latest research results in relevant subjects.
3) IMBA education program's faculty teaching ability improvement plan. The school makes clear about each course's position, function and relative importance in the curriculum system, conducts carefully planned IMBA training program in 'foundational skills' and 'specialized skills' by taking current faculty force and teaching quality analysis into consideration. According to the general plan of IMBA comprehensive reform experimental unit, the school focuses on 'case development and construction', 'mobile classroom design and organization' as key foundational skill training programs. Experts who have rich experience in case writing and mobile classroom are invited to direct the training of all IMBA faculty members, and to further promote faculty's enthusiasm and professional competence to adopting two above-mentioned teaching methods.

Summary
It has been the 3rd year since the School of Business Administration of Northeastern University launched its IMBA program. The school noticed the major weaknesses in this program and took measures to improve faculty members' teaching skills to resolve communicating problem along with other issues. We believe that NEU’s IMBA program will get better as faculty members getting more competent and confident in English-teaching.

Acknowledgement
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References
[1] Information on http://www.neu.edu.cn